

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 INR-10 NSAE-00 PM-05 NSC-05
SP-02 SS-15 L-03 HA-05 H-01 /059 W
-----067536 111141Z /14
R 101436Z MAY 78
FM AMEMBASSY PRAGUE
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5300

C O N F I D E N T I A L PRAGUE 1178

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PGOV, CSUL
SUBJECT: US-CZECHOSLOVAK EXCHANGES AGREEMENT-CONGRESSIONAL VIEWS

1. WE UNDERSTAND THAT DUE TO CONSIDERATIONS OF US PUBLIC
OPINION VIS-A -VIS THE HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA,
THE DEPARTMENT IS LEANING AGAINST SIGNING THE EXCHANGES
AGREEMENT AND TOWARD SHELIVING THE ENTIRE ISSUE--PERHAPS UNTIL NEXT
YEAR.

HOWEVER, FROM OUR ADMITTEDLY DISTANT VANTAGE POINT, WE SEE LITTLE
EVIDENCE THAT SIGNING THIS AGREEMENT WOULD PROVOKE MUCH ADVERSE
REACTION. IN FACT, CONGRESSIONAL STAFF VISITORS HERE SUGGEST SOME
CONGRESSMEN MIGHT ACTIVELY WELCOME THE AGREEMENT. IN ANY CASE,
BEFORE A FINAL DECISION IS REACHED, WE WOULD LIKE TO REGISTER
THE FOLLOWING THOUGHTS AS TO WHY WE STILL PREFER TO PROCEED IN A
BUSINESSLIKE MANNER TOWARD A LOW-KEY SIGNING OF THE
EXCHANGES ACCORD SOME TIME THIS SPRING.

2. WE HAVE JUST DISCUSSED LIKELY CONGRESSIONAL REACTIONS--
AS WELL AS THE AMERICAN PUBLIC OPINION ASPECT GENERALLY--
WITH THE HOUSE INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS STAFF OFFICER MAJAK
AND JOINT ECONOMIC COMMITTEE STAFF OFFICER HUGHES AND FOUND
THEM MARKEDLY POSITIVE. MAJAK, IN PARTICULAR,
TOOK AN UPBEAT APPROACH IN REASONING THAT MOST CONGRESSMEN WOULD
PROBABLY VIEW CZECHOSLOVAKIA WITH SYMPATHY DURING THIS TENTH
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ANNIVERSARY YEAR SINCE THE SOVITE INVASION OF 1968. MAJAK BELIEVES
THEY MIGHT, THEREFORE, WELCOME A MODEST US INITIATIVE AT THIS TIME TO
STRENGTHEN BILATERAL TIES. HE ADDED THAT SUCH AN INITIATIVE WOULD BE
SEEN AS A POSITIVE STEP IN OUR IMPLEMENTATION OF HELSINKI FINAL
ACT EFFORTS TO INCREASE THE "FREER FLOW OF PEOPLE, IDEAS,
AND INFORMATION" WITH EASTERN EUROPE.

3. WE FULLY RECOGNIZE THAT CURRENT DIFFERENCES WITH CZECHOSLOVAKIA OVER HUMAN RIGHTS CALL FOR PRUDENCE IN CONCLUSION OF THE EXCHANGES AGREEMENT PACKAGE. THIS MONTH'S DIFFICULTIES SURROUNDING THE EXPULSION OF AP CORRESPONDENT REID ARE ESPECIALLY TROUBLESOME AND MAY LEAD TO FURTHER STRAINS.

BUT TO PROCRASTINATE IN HOPES OF FINDING AN IDEAL TIME FOR SIGHINING IS IMPRACTICAL. FOR THE FORESEEABLE FUTURE THERE IS NEVER LIKELY TO BE A REALLY GOOD TIME TO SIGN--NOT THIS YEAR, NEXT YEAR, OR INTO THE 1980'S, AS FAR AS WE CAN TELL.

THE SOVIETS AND THEIR PROTEGES APPEAR SOLIDLY IN POWER IN PRAGUE AND THE RESTRICTIVE PHILOSOPHY GUIDING THEIR ACTIONS IS UNLIKELY TO CHANGE VERY RAPIDLY, EVEN IF THERE ARE LEADERSHIP CHANGES HERE CONCOMITANT WITH THE EVENTUAL PASSING OF THE BREZHNEV-KOSYGIN REGIME IN MOSCOW. MEANWHILE, WE WILL HAVE LITTLE OR NO LEVERAGE TO ENCOURAGE CHANGE IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA, THOUGH WE SHOULD TRY TO DEVELOP OPTIMUM BILATERAL TIES. IF WE WISH TO HAVE AN EXCHANGES AGREEMENT, THEN WE ARE EVENTUALLY GOING TO HAVE TO ACCEPT A TIMING THAT IS LESS THAN SATISFACTORY AND SIGN IT IN THE FULL EXPECTATION THAT THE FOLLOWING DAY'S NEWS MAY WELL FEATURE THE TRIAL OF A PROMINENT HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVISTS OR EXPULSION OF AN AMERICAN CORRESPONDENT.

4. THE FACT IS THAT OUR POLICY OBJECTIVES IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA RIGHTLY CENTER ON EFFORTS TO BUILD UP BILATERAL RELATIONS OVER THE LONG RUN IN HOPES OF HELPING PRAGUE GRADUALLY TO GAIN INCREASED
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INDEPENDENCE FROM MOSCOW. ON THE OTHER SIDE, THE SOVIETS ARE HYPERSENSITIVE TO SUCH EFFORTS AND WILL DOUBTLESS PLACE INNUMERABLE OBSTACLES IN THEIR WAY. IF WE ALLOW THESE OBSTACLES TO DELAY AD INFINITUM SUCH STEPS AS SIGNING THE EXCHANGES AGREEMENT, WE MAY BE MAINLY PLAYING INTO MOSCOW'S HANDS.

5. AMBASSADOR BYRNE CONCURRED IN THE DRAFT OF THIS MESSAGE BEFORE HIS MAY 10 DEPARTURE FROM POST.
FROWICK

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: AGREEMENTS, TREATY SIGNATURE, CULTURAL EXCHANGES
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 10 may 1978
Decaption Date: 01 jan 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978PRAGUE01178
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780200-0143
Format: TEL
From: PRAGUE
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t19780574/aaaackmq.tel
Line Count: 103
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 484830a1-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION EUR
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 16 may 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 2735594
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: US-CZECHOSLOVAK EXCHANGES AGREEMENT-CONGRESSIONAL VIEWS
TAGS: PGOV, SCUL, CZ, US
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/484830a1-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014